



Pre-Applications

Pre-Application Narrative

Pre-Application Cash Transmittal

Historical Documentation of the

# Nuss Building

4419 N. Scottsdale Road  
Scottsdale, Arizona

**Prepared for:**

Scottsdale Galleria Land Owner, LLC  
4501 N. Scottsdale Rd., Suite 201  
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**By:**



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## Introduction

This documentation was initiated by Scottsdale Galleria Land Owner LLC at the request of the City of Scottsdale in August, 2019. The subject building was demolished in July 2019 with City approval. Subsequently, the city determined a need for documentation of the building's historical and/or architectural significance to complement the photographic information that was already on file. The property owner retained Motley Design Group to prepare this documentation. The project team included Historical Architect Robert Graham, AIA and Consulting Historian Scott Solliday.

## Summary

The Nuss Building was constructed in 1960 for Alton Brooks Nuss of Cheyenne, Wyoming. Nuss commissioned local architect Ray Parrish to provide the building design. The building was a part of the development and expansion of downtown Scottsdale in the 1950s and 60s related to the rise of tourism. The building was a significant work of Ray Parrish, who was an alumnus of Taliesin West and whose work has been influential in the Scottsdale and Paradise Valley areas.

## Historic Context: Municipal Development of Scottsdale in the Post-World War II Era, 1945-1970

Through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Scottsdale was a small farming community (Fudala 2001, 2007; Lieber 1999). Completion of the Arizona Canal in the 1880s brought water to the area, which supported production of cotton, alfalfa, and citrus fruit. A small commercial district on the southeast corner of Scottsdale and Indian School roads served the isolated community. At the end of World War II, as the nation's economy began growing at an unprecedented rate, the neighboring cities of Phoenix and Tempe immediately started expanding with construction of new businesses and residential neighborhoods. In 1947 Scottsdale's business leaders reorganized their small Chamber of Commerce and sought a new vision of how they could benefit from the postwar boom. Their answer was a new slogan: "The West's Most Western Town."

While this was a rather unusual new identity for an agricultural community, it was an approach to building a local economy based on tourism. Early resorts in the area, such as the Jokake Inn and the Camelback Inn, had been quite successful at attracting wealthy guests, but Scottsdale was marketing to a new clientele of middle-class families that was starting to explore the country by automobile. A new image was promoted. The downtown district along Main Street was remodeled, and nondescript storefronts were covered with rough wood siding to create a frontier-era Old West town. This innovative approach soon proved to be quite successful. Thomas D. Darlington, an engineer with the Los Angeles-based firm AiResearch who had come to Phoenix in the late 1940s, became an important promoter of Scottsdale's new identity. In 1950 he turned the Brown's Mercantile building into Arizona Craftsmen, a studio for emerging artists (Fudala 2001, 2007). The success of this venture led to a proliferation of shops and galleries offering Western art and Native American arts and crafts, a specialized market that Scottsdale soon dominated. Two new resorts, the Safari Hotel and the Hotel Valley Ho, opened in the heart of downtown Scottsdale in the 1950s. The Valley Ho was particularly successful. Built by John B. Mills and managed by Bobby Foehl, an experienced hotelier who had managed the grand old San Marcos Hotel in Chandler and the rustic Jokake Inn north of Phoenix, it was immediately one of the most successful resorts in central Arizona, gaining a reputation for attracting a number of Hollywood movie stars to Scottsdale each year (Westroc Hospitality).

The Town of Scottsdale was incorporated in 1951 with a population 2037 residing within the one-square-mile townsite. Within just a few years of becoming the West's Most Western Town, it was well known for its guest ranches, resorts, winter festivals, and unique shops (Fudala 2001, 2007). In 1955 Scottsdale built a new stadium and hosted the Baltimore Orioles for their spring training season, adding the annual attraction of Major League Baseball each March. In that same year the Phoenix Open Golf Tournament was established in Scottsdale. Industry also came to Scottsdale when Motorola built a large electronics manufacturing plant in the southern part of town. This economic success brought many new residents (Wilson 2002). By 1960 Scottsdale had a population of 10,000, with another 30,000 people living in unincorporated areas just outside of the municipal boundaries. The early 1960s brought a huge development boom to keep up with the growth, with construction of new businesses, shopping centers, schools, residential subdivisions, and a hospital. A new City Hall and Scottsdale Public Library were completed in 1968; the acclaimed design by architect Bennie Gonzales marked the beginning of Scottsdale's Civic Center. As a result of this building activity, much of the city center reflects the architecture of the 1960s, with an emphasis on modern materials such as concrete and glass. However, there was also a proliferation of eclectic designs continuing the Old West theme, or incorporating other unusual styles, such as Trader Vic's, a restaurant with a Polynesian-style design. By 1970 Scottsdale's population reached 67,800, and the city incorporated an area of over 62 square miles.

The Nuss Building, located at 4419 North Scottsdale Road, was constructed in 1960 for Alton Brooks (A.B.) Nuss. Nuss was born in 1905, growing up in Topeka, Kansas. By 1940 he was an engineer working in Cheyenne, Wyoming (US Census records). Brooks was likely only a part time resident of the Salt River Valley, as he and his wife, Irene, do not show up in local directory records. In 1958 and 1959 Nuss was a participant in several land transactions in Scottsdale, culminating in the February, 1960 purchase of the land for his new office building from an ownership group consisting of Mort and Bertha Duff and King and Evelyn Taylor. By the time this transaction took place, he was divorced from Irene and took ownership as an individual (Maricopa County Recorded Documents).

The *Scottsdale Progress* of June 2, 1960 noted:

GROUND WAS BROKEN last week for the extensive A. B. Nuss business office building at Sherman lane and Scottsdale drive (sic). Officials participating included A. B. Nuss, owner; Robert R. Kepler, Am-Kep Construction company; Ray Parrish, architect; Tilton Keefe, Clevenger Realty; J. J. Amsbury, Am-Kep.

Leasing for the building began in January 1961. In the 1960s and 1970s the Nuss Building housed several small businesses and professional offices, such as real estate offices, title companies, insurance agencies, opticians, and barbers (Mullin-Kille Co. 1963; R.L. Polk & Co. 1965, 1969; Swaine's City Directory 1976). Though Scottsdale's street addresses were changed in 1965 to correspond with Phoenix's numbering system, buildings along Scottsdale Road between Main Street and Camelback Road retained their old addresses into the 1970s, so the Nuss Building was designated as 719 Old Scottsdale Road for several years. Up into recent years the building has continued to be occupied by small local businesses that serve the community (EMG 2014).

It appears that Nuss had greater plans for the site, as in 1965 the *Progress* reported:

The [planning] commission will again consider an application for high rise zoning on the northeast corner of Shoeman Lane and Scottsdale Rd., by architect Ray Parrish. The Miller - Nuss' Investors propose a nine - story hotel and office building at the corner. The corner is now zoned for commercial use. The application has been on the zoning agenda off and on since last summer, when the building plans were announced A. B. Nuss has also applied for high-rise zoning for two lots at the southeast corner of Shoeman Lane and Scottsdale Rd., now zoned for commercial use. [The latter site being the Nuss Building.]

A. B. Nuss died on January 6, 1970, in Cheyenne. Ownership of the Nuss Building property passed to his wife, Marian S. Nuss. In 1971, Tilton Keefe of Clevenger Realty was given power of attorney to manage the property. Marian herself passed away in 1982. James Hirsig and Kay Picard inherited the Nuss Building, closing the period of Nuss family ownership (Maricopa County Recorded Documents).

## The Architecture of Ray Parrish in Scottsdale, Arizona

Ray Parrish came to Arizona as an apprentice to Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin West. By 1949, he was on his own, doing custom residential work in the Scottsdale-Paradise Valley area, and became Arizona Registered Architect #1678 in 1951 (State Board of Technical Registration). In 1952 he was called upon to serve as the construction foreman for Wright's design for the David & Gladys Wright House (one of Wright's sons) in Phoenix's Arcadia neighborhood (Graham, 2012). By the late 1950s, Parrish was an established architect in Scottsdale and was influential in advancing Wrightian "organic architecture" as well as retro old-west thematic designs there. Among his contributions to Scottsdale architecture are the western-themed Ed Post Realty Building at 4333 N. Scottsdale Rd. (1960), the Westernaire Shops at 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. & Brown, and the modernist Kachina Theater (1961)(Scottsdale Progress 1960, Wilson & Abele, 2004).

The influences of Midcentury Modernism, Wrightian design principles, and faux-Western romanticism are all evident in Parrish's design for the Nuss Building. Its basic, simple form expresses its construction materials and building technology rather than hiding it, incorporating deeply cantilevered perimeter balcony and roof overhangs supported on expressed wood timbers and exposed masonry bearing walls. These horizontal planes were executed using an unusual tensioned horizontal concrete block system. The strongly horizontal composition and use of repetitive asymmetrical aluminum storefronts are typical of many midcentury office buildings. The Wrightian influence is evident in the balcony railing design, which incorporates angular steel tubing reminiscent of the roof structure of the architectural studio at Taliesin West itself. These harsh modern and geometric aspects of the building are softened by the use of rustic exposed face brick for exterior wall cladding over the concrete block structure and an oblique historical reference to old-west panel-brick commercial storefronts in the central stepped parapet framing the "NUSS BUILDING" sign.

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